

THE DANCE OF THE PEN, THE PLAY OF THE SIGN: A STUDY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MODERNITY, IMMANENCE, AND DECONSTRUCTION

Abdelwahab M. Elmessiri

According to the Islamic *tawhīdī* paradigm, God, after creating the world—both humanity and nature—*ex nihilo*, did not dwell in either of them or abandon them completely. God cares for the world but maintains a distance, a gap that separates Creator from created. This has resulted in a fundamental humanity–nature duality, which is echoed in many other dualities (e.g., body–soul, male–female). Humanity's existence is restricted by this gap's parameters, but it is also a human space in which the individual has the freedom to fulfill a human space and either to fulfill or abort his/her essence and potential. Through the limits imposed by this space, the individual passes from the state of nature to the state of culture, from a simple innocence that does not know good or evil to a complex experience that recognizes their existence. In short, humanity passes from *the embryonic stage*, in which the individual is both limitless and completely determined, with no space separating him/her from nature, to the divine (*rabbānī*) stage, where he/she is limited but, through these very limits, where freedom, dignity, identity, separate consciousness, and the abilities to loose and to transcend are gained. Humanity is part of nature, but not an organic part.

Comprehensive Secularism and Modernity

The concept of nature is a key concept in the Western philosophical tradition and its discourse regarding modernity. But to uncover the

Abdelwahab M. Elmessiri is Professor Emeritus, Ein Shams University, Cairo, Egypt.

underlying assumptions of any discourse, it is crucial to explicate its view of humanity. To achieve this objective, I will outline some basic traits of *nature* and *natural laws* as interpreted by Western modernity and point out their bearing on the image of humanity: 1) Nature is eternal, self-existent, self-directed, and self-referential; 2) Natural laws are immutable and cannot be violated or suspended; 3) Nature is a whole that subsumes everything else and thus allows no gaps, discontinuities, dualities, hierarchies, or irreducible entities; 4) Natural laws apply to both humanity and nature and assign no special status to humanity; 5) The basis of all natural phenomena is solid matter and fluid energy. However, whether solid or fluid, nature is in a state of continuous nonteleological flux; and 6) Humanity derives all its norms from nature.

Given this frame of reference, the best humanity can do is to *follow* nature and even *submit* to it. Once this is done, however, the individual loses his/her specific boundaries, becomes an organic part of nature, and is reduced completely to it. However, as all attributes of nature are attributes of matter, rather than use the term *nature*, it would clarify matters if we were to use a compound word, *nature-matter*, and talk of the nature-matter paradigm as the underlying paradigm of Western modernity.

By means of this compound term, we can decode many apparent mysteries of the Western discourse on modernity. Moreover, it will show the identity of Western modernity with *comprehensive secularism* (as opposed to *partial secularism*). *Partial secularism*, namely, the separation of church and state, is just that; it is a view of the world that does not claim any comprehensiveness, confines itself to the realms of politics and perhaps economics, maintains a complete silence on absolute or permanent values (moral, religious, or otherwise), and does not address itself to ultimate things (e.g., the origin of humanity, human destiny, the purpose of life, and other related matters).

Comprehensive secularism, on the other hand, is a completely different outlook. It does not merely aim at the separation of church and state and some aspects of public life; it aims at the separation of all values—religious, moral, or human—not only from the state but also from public and private life and from the world at large. The only source of norms and values is the world of nature-matter. Within this frame of reference, both humanity and society are seen as controlled by immutable natural laws and by value-free self-activating processes that lie beyond humanity's control. These natural laws are also called *scientific laws* and are supposed to apply to both humanity and nature. If we probe a little deeper, however, we discover that they operate in terms of the nature-matter paradigm and revolve around the concept of scientific natural/material laws. Western modernity could be defined as the adoption of value-free science as the basis of humanity's world outlook and as a source of values and norms. Rather than modifying the world to fit

human needs, longings, and aspirations, an individual's life is modified and reoriented to follow value-free, rational, natural, and immutable laws. In other words, *comprehensive secularism* is nothing more than another name for the outlook of Western modernity. The two words are almost synonymous. In referring to the one, we also refer to the other.

The Metaphysics of Immanence

Comprehensive secularism—modernity operating in terms of nature—matter is an immanentistic world outlook. *Immanence*, from the Latin verb *immanere*, means “to dwell.” *Immanent* means “indwelling,” “inherent,” “operating from within.” Therefore, anything (nature—matter, *the world* [in the discourse of comprehensive secularism], the superman in Nietzsche's philosophy) said to be self-contained, self-operating, self-activating, and self-explanatory would be described as *immanent*.

Immanence is usually opposed to *transcendence*, which is derived from the Latin verb *transcendere* (*trans* means “across” and “beyond”; *scandere* means “to climb”). *Transcendence* is going beyond what is given to our ordinary experience and beyond that which falls within the grasp of scientific explanation. *Immanent* is often used by pantheists to describe the way in which God dwells in, and is sometimes identified with, the created world. On the other hand, *transcendent* is often used by theists to describe the way in which God supposedly exists beyond, and independent of, the created world.

The metaphysics of immanence could deny the existence of God, but in some varieties it recognizes His existence. However, the God it believes in is always immanent in the world and has no existence that is separate from it. In Arabic, this is called *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being). There is another word in the Arabic lexicon, *ḥulūl* (indwelling, but it could also be translated as “union” or “immanence”). *Ḥulūl* is a process, a gradual unfolding of a sequence, whereas *waḥdat al-wujūd* is the final point and moment at which the sequence reaches its complete realization. The sequence begins when the transcendent Creator is perceived as being very close to (but not merging with) His creations (humanity and nature). In Muslim Arab folk tradition, children are referred to as *aḥbāb Allāh* (the beloved of God). This means that they are very close to God, which implies a touch of immanence. Nevertheless, there are two substances or essences in the world. An unbridgeable, though very narrow, gap exists between Creator and created. God is distinct from His creations, even though He is very close to them.

This kind of *ḥulūl*, if indeed it can be called such, can be accommodated readily within a theistic frame of reference. Most strains of Islamic mysticism belong in this category; hence the insistence in Sufi poetry on the distinction between the divine and the human and the continuous assertion that the talk of *union*, when and if it occurs, is simply figurative.

The same painstaking attempt to assert the independence of the divine from the human manifests itself in the distinction between *wahdat al-wujūd* and *wahdat al-shuhūd* (unity of witnessing, namely, unity of consciousness). *Wahdat al-shuhūd* puts awareness in the place of existence. The moment of *wahdat al-shuhūd* is not an ontological union with God, but rather a psychological or an epistemological condition, a heightened awareness of a unity encompassing humanity and the world and with God, as the unifying principle, dwelling at once in humanity and in nature and beyond them.

Yet, in some extreme Sufi trends, the level of *ḥulūl* increases until God literally dwells (*immanenre*) in and is identified completely with His creations. This is the final moment of *wahdat al-wujūd*; the organizing principle of the universe is now one with it, completely immanent in it, with no gap separating one from the other. Human space is thereby liquidated, for the universe becomes one organic whole, one essence, self-sufficient, self-activating, and self-explanatory. All phenomena, human or nonhuman and no matter how varied, are reduced, in the last analysis, to the principle immanent in the world. In other words, we have moved from the complex world of dualities (e.g., God–humanity, humanity–nature) to the organic simple world of monism, where the whole world can be reduced (or explained in terms of) one single principle.

Although monism assumes many formes and shapes, there are two basic kinds: spiritual and materialistic. The basic difference between the two lies in the way the organizing principle in the world is named. In the spiritual (or idealistic) variety, the one principle is named *God* or *spirit*. In the materialistic variety, it is named *nature* (in the material sense), *natural laws*, *laws of motion*, *laws of necessity*, or *scientific laws*. There is an intermediate—or rather indeterminate stage—between the two where the one principle assumes at once a quasispiritual and a quasimaterial form and name. It is then called *Geist*, *animus mundi*, *elan vital*, *absolute mind*, *absolute idea*, and a highly romanticized *nature* that is supposed to be suffused with the spirit of God. It also passes under such names as *spirit of history*, *laws of history*, *relations of production*, *eros*, or *eros and thanatos*. But whether spiritual or material or a mixture of both, the one principle is always immanent either in nature or in humanity or in both. Hegel has developed the most sophisticated discourse of immanence: all phenomena are at once material and spiritual; the *absolute idea* fulfills itself through nature–matter; and, at *the end of history*, all things coalesce and all dualities and specificities are liquidated to produce an organic unity, a complete pantheism.

If we look at the human individual as implicit in the immanentist/pantheist outlook, we notice that it is not different in any significant way from the view of the individual implicit in the nature–matter paradigm. After the liquidation of the human space, humanity loses its autonomy

and becomes part of larger entity (the one principle), with no gap separating the human individual from other creations. Therefore, one is no longer a free responsible agent capable of moral discrimination and choice. In addition, one's consciousness is of no importance, since, being part of a whole, the individual should do his/her utmost to submit to nature and to *dissolve* in it, or in the material flux, or in the *animus mundi*. One must be a passive agent who does not expect to have any distinction in the world, for the world of immanence is an embryonic world without boundaries or distinctions, devoid of both good and evil.

In moments of complete ecstasy, a process of unifying and levelling takes place; fish and fowl become humanity's equal, all become one. Then the ecstasy gets more and more intense, till the mystic reaches the state of nirvana, in which he/she literally becomes nothing. Annihilation (*fanā'*) is what a pantheist expects in this moment. All is levelled down, for the *animus mundi* runs indiscriminately through all creations, suffusing them with the same sanctity and to an equal degree. As a result, the sacred becomes equal with the profane, the holy and timeless with the unholy and temporal, the above with the below, good with evil, God with humanity, the relative with the absolute, everything with everything else, and eventually everything with *nihil*, nothing.

If immanence is of the spiritual variety, I prefer to use the word *pantheism* (since it contains the suffix *theism* from *theos* [God]). I use the word *immanence* to refer to the materialistic and quasispiritual variety. Materialistic immanence/pantheism is more important in the context of this paper, because it is the paradigm that underlies Western modernity. Its structural similarity with the nature-matter paradigm is quite striking. The discourse of modernity is nothing if not immanentistic. When we say that "the world (humanity and nature) is subject completely to the laws of nature," that "man is defined either in terms of production (Adam Smith and Marx) or reproduction (Freud)"; that "life is nothing but a struggle for survival" and that "survival is for the fittest"; that "the superhuman cannot be judged by any norms external to him/her"; that "the world is an organic whole"; that "one's consciousness cannot be separated from one's physical body"; that "a woman's body is her destiny"; that "blood and soil determine national characteristics"; that "evolution and movement are the main and only permanent traits of nature"; that "a human being is determined either by his/her natural or social environment or his/her genes"; that "a human being is nothing but this or that material element"; that "matter is self-regulating"; that "science is value-free and derives its values from within itself"; that "all things and all values are relative"; that "all things are sacred" or that "nothing is sacred"—if we make any of the above statements, we are assuming, consciously or unconsciously, a highly organic, unified, self-sufficient, self-referential, self-explanatory, and self-activating universe with nothing beyond it. Immanence is all.

Deconstruction

We have argued so far that modernity, ergo comprehensive secularism, is a form of immanence. Therefore, rising levels of secularization means rising levels of immanentization. We have also argued that the process of immanentization leads to the virtual disappearance of God as the transcendental organizing power in the universe. God, initially, dwelled in both humanity and nature, which resulted in the sharp dualisms of humanity versus nature and of subject versus object. This gives rise to two types of monism: solipsistic imperialist monism, wherein the self-referential human subject deifies itself and declares itself the organizing principle of the world, and naturalist materialist monism, wherein the self-referential natural object arrogates for itself the status of being the only organizing principle. The first type of monism places humanity above nature; the second does exactly the opposite. This dualism is resolved through the deepening of the process of immanentization. Different spheres of an individual's life separate themselves from him/her and from his/her grasp in order to become self-activating, self-transforming, and self-explanatory. In other words, they acquire the traits of the nature-matter paradigm.

The paradigmatic sequence of immanentization—secularization, modernization, and naturalization—in the West began during the late Middle Ages when some economic enclaves in Europe developed in the absence of the regulation of Christian values or such concepts as fair price. The only criteria applied to the economic activity and economic success and failure of such enclaves were strict economic criteria that were unadulterated by any moral or human considerations. In other words, the economic sphere was immanentized, became value-free, referred only to itself, for its criteria and standard were immanent.

The same pattern repeated itself in all other spheres of human activity. The political sphere, for instance, witnessed the birth of the theory of the modern state during the Renaissance. The state, rather than seeking legitimacy in a religious or moral basis, became value-free and justified itself by *raison d'être*. In other words, it became self-justifying, self-validating, and self-referential. The realm of politics freed itself from any values external to it and was judged by its own immanent criteria. One sphere after another separated itself from religious, moral, or human values and considerations, became self-sufficient, self-regulating, self-transforming, and self-explanatory, until we finally reached science. This sphere also freed itself from human views and purposes and so became value-free and purpose-free. Scientific laws and norms are supposed to be immanent in scientific processes (e.g., observation, experimentation, and generalization) that exclude human longing and purpose as something *external* to them. Emotions and human purposefulness are not, after all, *scientific*; they are merely teleological.

The world confronted the individual as being made up of different self-referential spheres of activity, all of which have the attributes of nature-matter and its own immanent laws. Humanity was subjected to the same process of immanentization (secularization-modernization-atomization). The human individual became self-referential within his/her puny self-referential immanentized self, a process that meant the atomization of both the community and the self. The latter was reduced and fragmented further.

Far from being self-referential, the individual is seen as a natural (material) being with no gap separating him/her from matter, which makes up his/her whole being, not only from without but also from within. If one's motivation comes from without, the individual takes many forms, the most important being *economic man/woman*, who is reducible to a number of identifiable material needs to be satisfied and to an amount of energy to be used (and sold as labor). The individual is productive and represents purchasing power to be exploited (fully), in terms of input and output and means and forces of production, and to be utilized in production and consumption. If motivation comes from within, one becomes *physical man/woman* or *libidinal man/woman*, who is charted in terms either of external stimuli and responses (a nervous system), or in terms of a dark yet natural and physical libido. This heralds the liquidation of the humanity-nature dualism and the rise of naturalistic monism, namely, the dominance of the human subject by the nature-matter paradigm. The human subject is no longer the organizing or unifying principle in the universe; it is nothing but a part of the natural material whole.

We can view the whole process of immanentization/modernization/secularization in terms of the death of God discourse. God first became incarnate not in one man but in humanity as a whole, and not temporarily but permanently. This led to the rise of humanism and the solipsistic subject. This humanism becomes racism when God is incarnate in one people; it becomes fascism when God is incarnate in the leader. But the incarnation is not confined to the human sphere, for God becomes incarnate in nature. This gives rise to the sharp dualism referred to earlier and the frantic attempt of German *idealistic* philosophy to assert the parallelism of humanity and nature, subject and object. Then God became incarnate in nature-matter only, at which point *ḥulūl* (gradual indwelling) reached its final point of a materialistic *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being), with nature-matter at the center. Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel all operated in terms of this stage of immanence, which, despite all its fluctuations and divisions, is logocentric. This gave rise to the Enlightenment, Western rationalism, and what I term *heroic materialism*.

But the process went on inexorably, and immanentization (secularization/modernization) went deeper. The center kept on shifting and the incarnations became too many, until we were faced with multiple centers.

Nature itself was fragmented and atomized. Losing its stability, coherence, and self-referentiality, it could no longer serve as a stable center.

All this means that we have moved from the solid logocentric stage of modernity to its liquid stage, the stage of materialist irrationalism and antiheroism and a centerless world. We have left behind not only Prometheus and Faustus, but also Frankenstein. Now we have Madonna and Michael Jackson; instead of Dracula now we have Derrida.

This shift from the solid to the liquid is latent in the nature-matter paradigm. As indicated earlier, nature is made up of either (solid) matter or (fluid) energy. But solid or fluid, the main characteristic of nature-matter, even in its most solid conditions, is the fact that it is in a permanent state of motion. All things change except change itself. This continuous state of change is called *flux* (from Latin *fluere*, "to flow"). The idea of changing, fluctuating nature-matter goes back to the pre-Socratic philosophers. Heraclitus stated that "nothing remains the same" and "all things change" (flow, separate, dissolve). This is why "you cannot step into the same river twice," for reality is a flux, a river that never stops flowing. But Heraclitus, not daring enough to accept the philosophical implications of a thorough materialism, postulated a *logos*, an immanent cause of pattern and identity that is evident in the constant flux of things. His universe is logocentric and is characterized by a dualism of permanence and change, of fixity and flux.

Others espoused the flux as the terminal point, the only immanence. They accepted the nature-matter paradigm with all its dark implications. Gorgias, a Sophist, summarized this philosophical attitude rather dramatically and succinctly: there is nothing; even if there were something, we could not know it; and even if we could know it, we could not communicate our knowledge about it. We cannot express any knowledge we may have, because no two people can think of the same thing, since the same thing cannot be in two places. Everything escapes humanity's grasp only to fall in the grip of flux.

All this leads to atomism. In an atomistic universe, however, all atoms are not only equal—they are also identical. We actually can talk of an *atomistic monism*, a flat world of innumerable atoms, with each atom, ensconced in its small narrative, frantically moving without purpose or direction. There is no *logos* or center, no coherent perceiving subject or coherent perceived object, for flux is all. All reality is dissolved into atoms, and all is deconstructed and reduced to a meaningless flux.

The modernist secular project is nothing if not deconstructive. This is what Hobbes discovered from the very beginning: The individual, living exclusively within its temporality, is nothing but a wolf to his/her fellows. Western philosophical discourse, trying to cover up this dark truth, evolved the Enlightenment project, which proclaimed the rise of a *natural man/woman* who, although lacking a divine origin, nevertheless is

both innately good and perfectible. But the dark enlighteners were there all the time, vigorously deconstructing, with Darwin pointing out the jungle without, and Freud pointing out the jungle within.

Nietzsche is the philosopher who uncovered, celebrated, and articulated this dark truth: Humanity cannot have a world that is both materialistic and logocentric, temporal and meaningful. True temporality means freedom from values and purpose. Even the idea of totality, the very basis of a centered universe, cannot be sustained. The true meaning of the death of God is that humanity will live in the indeterminate and the contingent. To go on talking of causality and totality would imply that even though God is dead, His shadow is still there. The metaphysics of immanence is thereby subverted. Nietzsche called for a total erasure of the shadow of God, because only in this way could we attain a truly modern world, a free centerless universe that contains no essence, no totality, no right or wrong, no cause and effect, no human nature, no purpose or direction, no objective reality, no possibility of rational discourse, no subject or object, and no sacred or profane. Nothing but supermen and submen; nothing but autonomous eternal recurrence. Any hankering after transcendence, any talk of *supernatural naturalism* or *transcendence through matter* is mere self-delusion, an arrogant self-deification and self-sanctification.

Modernity has been rightly described as the desanctification of the world, both humanity and nature. One notices the preponderance of verbs with the prefix *de* used to describe some aspects of modernity: *demystify*, *debunk*, *demythologize*, *demetaphysicalize*, *decenter*, and *dehumanize*, all of which are the precursors of our omnipresent, omnivorous *deconstruct*. Richard Rorty, using as yet another verb with the ominous prefix, spoke of the modernity project as *the dedivinization project*; the human individual will not divine anything, will not worship anything, not even himself/herself. Nothing will be deemed sacred, and any urge to transcend the spatiotemporal *donnee* will not be experienced, for the individual's origins are not transcendent. And because one is finite and contingent, one will ask no ultimate questions, but rather will live in a world of innocent signs that have no origin or truth.

Rorty's statement has the virtue of dealing directly with the view of humanity that is implicit in the postmodernist deconstructive project. Unfortunately, postmodernist discourse is not always so clear. On the contrary, it tends to be swollen and inflated. For example, postmodernism was described by a postmodernist, as being against "logocentric, totalizing, transcendental, metanarratives." The text was described by another as "emanating from nowhere, intended by no one, referring to nothing, bombinating in the void." The corruption of language here is an expression of a cultural and philosophical project that has reached a deadlock, that sees reality in terms of *post* something or other (e.g., *postcapitalist*, *postindustrial*), and that looks at the world and sees nothing but void.

Nevertheless, postmodernist discourse could be deconstructed and reconstructed in more intelligible and general terms. Even a void can be interpreted. Silence is said to be eloquent. Postmodernism has its metaphysics, despite its frantic attempt to disclaim any metaphysical stance. While it denies transcendence, totality, permanence, and duality, its very denial has shown its true philosophical identity as an expression of the metaphysics of immanence. In other words, postmodernism is only a higher (or lower) stage in the development of the modernity project and immanentization/secularization. It could be a mode of reading texts that has produced a lot of verbiage. However, there is a paradigm behind the terminological and phraseological labyrinth, and there is a definite method, rooted in a paradigm, in the postmodernist indefinite, indeterminate madness.

There are different varieties of monism. Traditional pagan pantheism translated itself into a cosmic monism, where God dwells in the fatherland and His chosen people, where God, land, and people form a totality. I have already referred to solipsistic imperialist humanist monism, where the *logos* dwells in the subject, and to naturalistic materialistic monism, where the *logos* dwells in the natural object. But given the fact that neither subject nor object could serve as a center (*logos*) for the universe through the rising levels of immanentization/secularization, there was no option but liquidity, an atomistic monism, where flux is accepted as the only organizing (or disorganizing) principle of the universe.

The whole issue of the relationship between signifier and signified is a manifestation of atomistic monism. If the signifier is separated from the signified by a gap, a duality of perceptible and imperceptible, of sensible and intelligible, of speech and writing, and of nature and culture, it would result in and would subvert monism, for it would mean that there is something beyond the mere flux—in other words, that there is a meaning, a *telos*.

One face of the duality, the sensible side of the sign, is submerged in flux. But what about the intelligible? It inevitably turns its face away from the flux to an individual capable of interpreting and communicating the meaning perceived by that individual. This means that the human condition is above mere flux and is not entrapped in the limitlessness of the embryonic condition and a meaningless state of nature. But once the intelligible side of the signifier is seen to lie outside the flux of nature, the chain of transcendence continues until it reaches an ultimate point of fixity outside the flux, namely, God. Therefore the demons of deconstruction, dissemination, and *la différance* could be stopped.

As Derrida has averred, the intelligible part of the sign turns its face to God, to a *logos*. In other words, the world turns out to be logocentric, rooted in a transcendental signified, an ultimate referent, an absolute foundation, outside the play of language, which is adequate to center

(that is, to anchor and to organize) the linguistic system in such a way as to fix the particular meaning of a spoken or written utterance within that system. On the other hand, the absence of a transcendental signified liquidates all dualities and thereby extends the domain and play of signification infinitely and exclusively in the world of flux. Therefore, the system of signs has to be freed from its deeprooted metaphysical assumptions so that the whole world becomes a game, a true embryonic situation without boundary, choice, or accountability. This could be achieved if the gap separating the signifier and the signified is bridged completely, so that they form a tight organic unity— with no gap separating the one from the other, the one actually becomes the other. In this way, the signifier is freed from the signified and from reality and can go in any direction. It is a total incarnation, a thorough iconization, without a *logos* or a *telos*.

Once the signs are emancipated from the transcendental signified, every sign would refer to another sign, which, in turn, would refer to a third. Every interpretation would refer to another, which, in turn, would refer to a third, *ad infinitum*. Deconstructive vertigo would then begin. Limitless interpretation, an unrestricted semantic play that is no longer anchored in any signified, would be the result. Texts would become mere “black on blank,” or, like the words in a dictionary, where every word refers to another with no center to stop the play of the sign, “the dance of the pen.” Everything is everything else, and everything is nothing. Or, as Derrida put it in his inflated and unnecessarily convoluted style, “What is not deconstruction? Everything, of course. What is deconstruction? Nothing, of course.”

Celebrating the great nothingness, the sixteenth-century Egyptian poet Ibn Sawdūn al Miṣrī wrote nonlogocentric poems that would deconstruct themselves. His poetry is characterized by high organic unity, as he avoids conscientiously the idea of meeting. As a result, his signifiers are freed from the signified and refer only to themselves:

Earth is earth: and heaven is heaven,
And hell is said to be infernal.
We sat amidst running water,
As if we were people sitting surrounded by water.

This poem goes on to obliterate metaphor (*majāz*) and denies transcendence (*tajāwuz*). The result is fleeting irony, for the nihilist ironist does not stand on any firm ground: everything fluctuates. But nihilist as he is, Ibn Sawdūn, like the modernist absurdist, actually is protesting against a Godless universe. He waits for Godot, and Godot never appears. The protest shows that language has not yet been freed completely from its foundations, for it still tries to refer to something.

Some postmodernists argue that the most iconic and transparent language that approximates—perhaps embodies—the complete freedom of the sign from the transcendental signified are screams of pain, in which there is no gap between the monosyllabic scream of pain and the pain itself. Monosyllabic expressions of sexual *plaisir* are classified likewise. It is all very embryonic. Derrida found a truly embryonic poem written by Antoine Artaud (advocate of the theater of cruelty). It is mere sounds, written by a truly dancing pen:

afidana/nakimov/taudidana/taukomiv/
nasidano/nakomiv/trakoniv/nakomi

These utterances cannot be distinguished from those made by lower animals (dolphins, I understand, have a very sophisticated language of communication). This is a fulfillment of Derrida's dream of finding signs uncontaminated by history or metaphysics, signs used before the eve of creation when Adam was still mere clay and before God had taught him all the names of plants and animals, as mentioned in the Qur'an.

But if this is indeed the case, then silence would be the real fulfillment of the paradigm, for humanity would become part "of mute insensate things." Is that not the real nirvana, *fanā'*, annihilation? Is that not the true realization of postmodernism? Derrida, in his search for an ideal text, found the following phrase: "I left my umbrella." It was written by Nietzsche on a blank sheet of paper and found among his papers. We do not know the occasion for writing this poem, to whom it was intended—if to anyone at all—whether he actually left his umbrella, or whether the umbrella is real or a very private symbol. It is a true signifier without a signified.

The following poem entitled "xwnd-?4%3I" could be seen as the ultimate postmodernist text:

It is not black on blank; it is blank on blank. No postmodernist can accuse me of logocentricity, because there is no language contaminated by metaphysics. It is complete void. Mine is such a pristine language that it does not exist. It is *nihil*, a nothing. Silence is indeed eloquent. But this alerts us to the fact that our transparent poem is, after all, contaminated by metaphysics; it is logocentric, for even silence is meaningful. Whatever is human has a *telos*, and *telos* refers to *logos*, to the one God, who is beyond nature and history.